

**Norwichtrails**

Discover the city's  
history on foot



# ELM HILL



**NORWICH  
HEART**



From the medieval period until the start of the Industrial Revolution Norwich was England's second city, enormously prosperous and culturally active.

This has created a very rich legacy of heritage, with the city proudly boasting the largest intact medieval street pattern in Europe, two outstanding cathedrals, a Norman castle and a staggering 32 medieval churches.

The Norwich Trails series will help you explore Norwich's outstanding heritage by foot, showing you the historic highlights of this fascinating and beautiful city and some of its hidden gems.

## The Elm Hill historical Trail

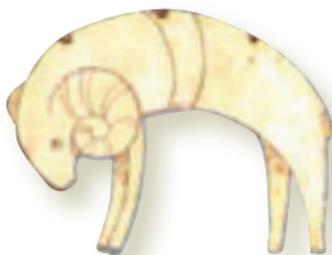
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## Elm Hill



Elm Hill is the city's most famous medieval street, almost the same in appearance now as it was when most of its properties were last rebuilt, after the major fire of 1507. At that time it was home to prosperous merchants, craftsmen and civic dignitaries. This charming cobble street was saved from demolition during slum clearance in the 1920s and is now home to a number of individual and speciality shops and cafes.



### Map refs:

- 1 The Halls – St Andrew's and Blackfriars' (OPEN MON-SAT)
- 2 Cinema City (OPEN DAILY)
- 3 Garsett House



Begin your walk at the circular seat on St Andrews Plain, on the corner of St Georges Street and Princes Street, and take a look round. To the left are **St Andrew's and Blackfriars' Halls** (see opposite).

To the right adjoining St Andrew's Church is **Cinema City** (Suckling House), converted from the 14th century house of Robert Suckling, Mayor in 1572 and 1582. The banqueting hall and arched bays of the kitchen and buttery survive. Horatio Nelson's mother, Catherine Suckling, was a member of this eminent Norwich merchant family. Their tomb and monuments are in the adjacent St Andrew's Church.

Ahead, on the east side of St Andrews Plain, and occupying the site of a much earlier medieval building, is **Garsett House**, former home of Robert Garstead (or Garsett), Sheriff in 1599. Said to have been built in 1589, it is reputed to contain timbers from a Spanish Armada galleon, hence its earlier name of Armada House which can be seen on the Victorian south gable. Half the house on that side disappeared to make way for a link road from Redwell Street, built in 1898 so that the new trams could avoid the difficult Princes Street corner.

*L-R: Garsett House (1935),  
Suckling House (1935),  
St Andrew's Church*



## THE HALLS – ST ANDREW'S AND BLACKFRIARS'



The Halls were built more than 600 years ago as the home of the Dominicans (known as the Black Friars because of the colour of their habits), largely funded from bequests by the people of Norwich.

After the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, Augustine Steward (three times Mayor of Norwich) sent a proposition to King Henry VIII, asking if the city could buy the buildings. By pledging to use The Halls for the good of the citizens, for fairs and feasting, Steward ensured the friary's survival. Over the years the buildings have been used as a school, granary, workhouse, building stores and even a mint, as well as for civic assemblies, ceremonial banquets and public receptions.

St Andrew's Hall has an impressive hammer beam roof, a gift of the Paston family, whose townhouse was in nearby Elm Hill. The tower that can be seen above collapsed in 1712, causing much damage to the rest of the building, which was extensively restored in 1863.

The Halls now hold the country's largest collection of civic portraits, totalling 127 late 16th to 19th century paintings of Norwich Mayors, Sheriffs and other dignitaries. They host conferences, antique fairs, markets, weddings, concerts and the largest provincial beer festival in the country.

### Map refs:

- 4 4-6 Princes Street
- 5 United Reformed Church (OPEN TUE-FRI AND SUN am)
- 6 Boardman House (OPEN MON-FRI)
- 7 St Peter Hungate Church (OPEN THU-SAT)



As you walk up Princes Street notice the plaque beside the door of number 3 informing us that it was formerly the Rectory for the nearby church of St Michael At Plea. Opposite is **4-6 Princes Street**, a timber framed mansion built around 1600 by Richard Mann. It is the only merchant house in Norwich to survive intact from James Corbridge's map of 1727 when it was occupied by John Reeve. Recently, its upper floors have been completely restored and the end gable rebuilt.

Pause at the junction with Elm Hill; to the right is the **Princes Street United Reform Church**.

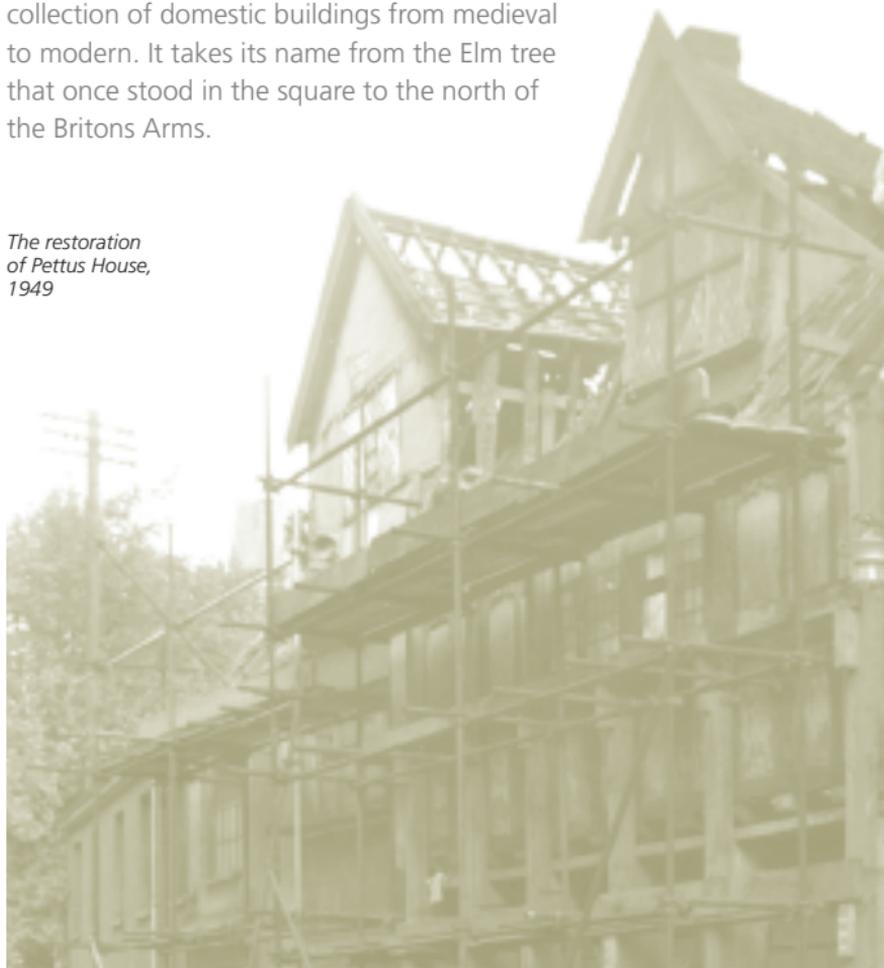
Built in 1869 as the Princes Street Congregational Church, it was designed by Edward Boardman who was also a member of the congregation. The interior is well worth a look with its distinctive coloured ceiling panels. Behind the church is **Boardman House** – entrance on Redwell Street – built in 1879 for use as the parish hall and Sunday school but now used as offices.

On the opposite side of the road is the church of **St Peter Hungate** which dates from the fifteenth century but has been restored since. It has a hammerbeam and arched brace roof and a solitary wall monument – to the wealthy merchant Mathew Goss who died in 1779. From 1933 until 1995 it was a museum of church history. It is now a centre for Hungate Medieval Art; a charity which promotes medieval church art with an initial focus on stained glass. Look up at the unusual pyramid shaped cap on the tower. It was put on in 1906 after the tower became unsafe and the top stage had to be removed.



**Walk down Elm Hill.** This charming cobbled street is now restored as a City showpiece after being saved from slum clearance and road widening in the 1920s. Elm Hill has a fine collection of domestic buildings from medieval to modern. It takes its name from the Elm tree that once stood in the square to the north of the Britons Arms.

*The restoration  
of Pettus House,  
1949*



### Map refs:

- 8 The Britons Arms (OPEN MON-SAT)
- 9 14 Elm Hill

**The Britons Arms** is early Tudor. The sole surviving building in the street of a disastrous fire in 1507, it is one of only five thatched buildings remaining in the city centre. Formerly an inn, its name was changed in 1804 from the King's Arms to reflect the strong, Jacobin, anti-Royalist sympathies of Norwich citizens at that time. The doorway at the rear, facing the churchyard of St. Peter Hungate, survives from an earlier building which was the only known English beguinage: a charitable lay sisterhood common in the Netherlands and Flanders.



*L-R: Elisha de Hague, a town clerk who lived at No. 14 in the 18th century, No. 14 or 16 Elm Hill*



**Number 14 Elm Hill** became the home of a Benedictine monastery in 1863 when the self-proclaimed Father Ignatius set up the Priory of St Mary and St Dunstan. When first opened it accommodated Ignatius, one of his colleagues and a dog. Money being short, they apparently existed on a diet of bread and potatoes at first! His stay in Norwich was short and

controversial but before he left he raised the money to build the Monastery building at the rear of number 14. The intention was to provide a church for the members of his congregation but it was not to be and it now forms part of the Norwich School of Art and Design. It can be seen by entering 'The Monastery' car park and looking to the right.

### Map refs:

- 10 The Strangers Club and Crown Yard
- 11 Pettus House
- 12 Wrights Court



No. 22-24, The **Strangers Club**, occupies the site of the town house of Margaret Paston. The Pastons, a wealthy Norfolk landowning family, are well known for their Letters chronicling everyday life during the 15th century. Augustine Steward, a wealthy mercer who was Mayor of Norwich three times, rebuilt the house, much as we see it today, after the fire of 1507. Steward's merchant's mark and that of the Mercer's company can be seen on the beam above Crown Court to the left of the building.



Further along on the opposite side, **Pettus House** (numbers 41-43), is a surviving fragment of the mansion occupied by the Pettus family from 1550 to 1683. Like Augustine Steward, Thomas Pettus and his father John were both mercers (or cloth merchants) and friends of the Pastons.

*L-R: Crown Court, Wrights Court, The Strangers Club*

In **Wright's Court** you can see an almost perfectly preserved example of a 19th century Norwich courtyard. Here in the 1850s stood the factory of Wright and Son, who made "plain and fancy fabrics" and were said to have employed 1,500 handloom weavers. This was one of several factories in Elm Hill, once a very different street from today.

## NORWICH, THE HOME OF TEXTILES

People are usually surprised to find out that Norwich had an important part to play in the textile world. The early medieval cloth industry was based on the production of a variety of woollen and linen cloths and from the 16th century Norwich specialised in lighter cloths. Success rested on the combination of technical knowledge introduced by the Dutch, Flemish and Walloon settlers known as 'Strangers', and the expertise of the Norwich-born cloth workers. In the 17th and 18th centuries 'Norwich Stuffs' were known throughout Europe and beyond and the Norwich Shawls of the 19th century were amongst the most beautiful and technically advanced fabrics of their age.

During the Industrial Revolution, the Norwich textiles industry was eclipsed by rapid industrialisation elsewhere. The city responded by re-inventing itself as a centre for making shawls, horsehair fabrics and crapes, but its share of the trade gradually fell away.

The last cloth was made in Norwich in the late 1970s. Bomb damage, slum clearance and road schemes have destroyed much of the textiles landscape. But look more closely and the legacy of textile power is unmistakable – traces of wealth generated in the city's churches, public buildings and charities and in its stock of merchant and artisan housing.





Almost opposite Pettus House is **Towler's Court** – a reminder of Norwich's almost forgotten shawl weaving industry that flourished during the first half of the nineteenth century. A weaver by trade Abel Towler wove shawls at his factory here until the business was wound up in 1855. His shawls were renowned, winning prizes; at the Great Exhibition of 1851 at The Crystal Palace he exhibited 'fillover scarves with silk ground, printed silk and silk net shawls'. Examples of his wares can be

seen, by appointment, at the Costume and Textiles Study Centre collection at Carrow House, King Street, Norwich. In 1881 his grandson, also named Abel Towler, was using the same premises as a 'boot and shoe manufactory'. It continued as a shoe factory for some years – an illustration of the changing face of industry in Norwich as the new thriving shoe industry replaced the dying weaving trade as the major provider of employment in Norwich – in this case in the same premises.



Before moving on, look up at the **parish markers** above number 28. The markers, most of which date from the 18th and 19th centuries defined the extent of each parish. In the absence of detailed maps they were used to assist with the collection of the parish rates and in resolving disputes. At one time there were several hundred in Norwich but only about 90 remain. The majority are made of metal but there are a few stone markers. These in Elm Hill indicate where the parish of St Peter Hungate joins that of St Simon and St Jude; displaying the initials of each parish and the year the marker was put up.

**Map ref:**

14 St Simon and St Jude Church

At the end of Elm Hill is the church of **St Simon and St Jude**. It is dedicated to two apostles who, according to some, preached the gospel in Persia and were martyred. There has been a church here for over a thousand years but much of the current building dates from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It was closed for worship in 1892 and fell into disrepair, the tower collapsing in 1911. Two years later it was renovated for use as a Sunday school but fell into disuse by the 1920s and was threatened with demolition. Repaired again in 1940 it was used for many years as a hall for the Scout movement and is now a dance studio. It is the burial place of members of the Pettus family who lived in Elm Hill and who are commemorated by a number of newly restored monuments of this influential Norwich family. Sir John Pettus was a member of the Virginia Company, knighted by Elizabeth the First in 1601 and he was Mayor of Norwich in 1608.



*L-R: Sir John Pettus,  
St Simon and St Jude Church*



**Map ref:**

15 The Maids Head Hotel (OPEN DAILY)



Turn right into Wensum Street where facing you is **The Maids Head Hotel**, the only one of Norwich's two remaining coaching inns to survive (the Bell Hotel is the other). It dates from 1287 but its foundations are older, dating from Norman times. The "Norwich Machine" – the first regular stagecoach service to London – departed from here in 1762.

The present day front of the hotel was probably the mansion of Thomas Anguish, a Norwich merchant of Scottish ancestry who was Mayor in 1611 and who by a bequest in his will established the famous Norwich School for Poor Boys known popularly as the Bluecoat school. Friendly with the Pettuses and Pastons, Anguish was a frequent visitor to the Maids Head. His quarrels with his wife were notorious, and he is said to have been "great at bowls".



*L-R: The Maids Head Hotel (1934), Thomas Anguish*



**Map ref:**

16 Augustine Steward House (OPEN TUE-SAT)

17 Samson and Hercules House



*L-R: The figures of Samson and Hercules from the porch of Samson and Hercules House, Augustine Steward House*



Moving into Tombland, on the right hand side is **Augustine Steward House**, built in 1549 as the home of the wealthy Tudor merchant, Mayor and MP whose name it bears. Steward was known as the most active and public spirited citizen of his day, carrying out substantial repairs to the Guildhall and purchasing St Andrew's and Blackfriars' Halls on behalf of Norwich Corporation. In this house he played host to Lord Northampton's mercenaries when they came to Norwich to put down Kett's Rebellion – and had to barricade himself in when it was looted by the victorious rebels. Later, a second force of troops under the Earl of Warwick successfully quelled the rebellion, due largely to Steward's courage in opening the city gates at the height of the rioting. His merchants' mark and the arms of the Mercers Company can be seen on the building. Next door **Samson and Hercules House**, with its guardian figures, incorporates the remains of a medieval house, formerly the home of Sir John Fastolf (the model for Shakespeare's Falstaff) and later of the Countess of Lincoln.

### Map refs:

18 St George's Church Tombland (RESTRICTED OPENING)

19 Tombland

Turn right into Tombland Alley passing under Augustine Steward House and at the end of the alley turn left to the church of

**St George**, Tombland.

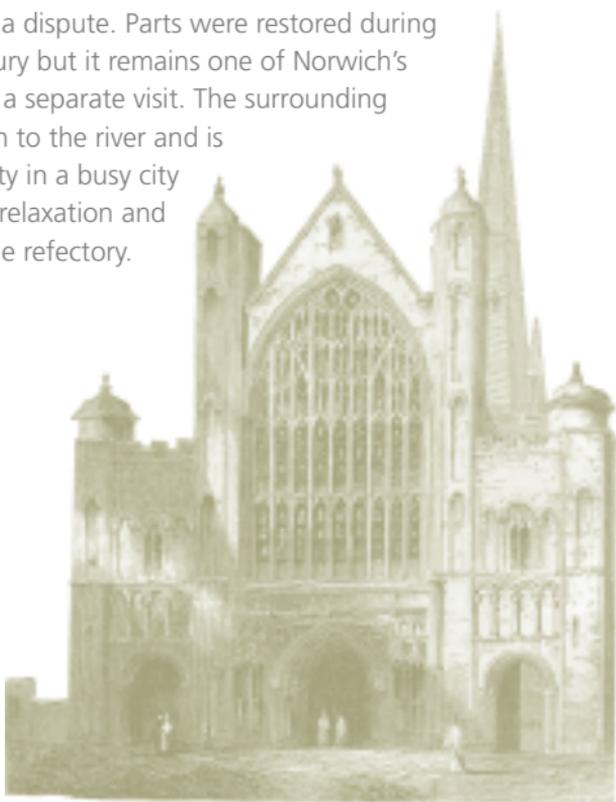
In a churchyard which has seen 4,000 burials the church is still used for worship and welcomes visitors. Like so many of the Norwich churches it was restored in the late nineteenth century. It contains many monuments, including that of Mary Gardiner dated 1748 by Peter Scheemakers, a Flemish sculptor who lived for many years in England, and a stained glass window from the studio of William Morris. The extraordinary mosaic windows in the north aisle are of the 1860s, and may be the earliest surviving Victorian coloured glass in Norwich. The large clock on the porch, made by Maltby in 1786, is reputedly the only parish church clock which strikes in the city of Norwich.



Turn left upon leaving the church back into **Tombland**. Nothing to do with tombs or burials, its name means empty or open space. In the eighth and ninth centuries it was a market place but the building of the Cathedral Close and the removal of the market to its present location reduced it in size and changed its use. On the north side are the two great gates to the Cathedral – the Erpingham gate to the left and Ethelbert to the right.

**Map ref:****20** Norwich Cathedral (OPEN DAILY)

**Norwich Cathedral** – the Cathedral of the Holy and Undivided Trinity sits on low lying land close to the river and therefore despite its spire being the second tallest in England, is hidden from view in much of the city. Building was begun by Herbert de Losinga in 1096 but took fifty years to be completed. The building suffered a series of fires during the first five hundred years of its existence – the evidence of which is still visible today in the pink colour of the limestone on some of the pillars. The cloister was rebuilt following the riots of 1272 when citizens of Norwich broke in to the Cathedral following a dispute. Parts were restored during the nineteenth century but it remains one of Norwich’s treasures and worth a separate visit. The surrounding Close stretches north to the river and is an oasis of tranquillity in a busy city and ideal for gentle relaxation and perhaps a meal in the refectory.



### Map refs:

21 St Mary the Less Church

22 Old Bank of England Court

*L-R: Old Bank of England Court,  
St Mary the Less Church,  
Edward Boardman*



Leave Tombland at the south east corner into Queen Street. About half way up on the right, almost hidden behind its wrought iron gates, is the church of **St Mary the Less**. The origin of the name is unclear. St Mary's ceased being used as a place of worship at the time of the Reformation: was bought by the city corporation who leased it to the Walloon weavers for use as a cloth hall. Later restored to use as a church for French Protestants, it was used by other denominations until 1953. It is in private ownership and used as a centre for the study of the Low Countries.

Further along Queen Street, behind its cast iron railings, is **Old Bank of England Court**. There is no longer a branch of the bank there but the court contains the offices formerly inhabited by Edward Boardman, one of Norwich's most influential nineteenth century architects whose work included the conversion of Norwich Castle from a gaol to a museum, designing the Royal Hotel and the Alexandra Mansions on Prince of Wales Road (now the Mercy nightclub). His office is marked by an elaborate red brick frieze spelling out his name.

**Map ref:****23** St Michael at Plea Church (OPEN MON-FRI)

To the right at the end of Queen Street is the now redundant church of **St Michael at Plea**. Probably a pre-Conquest foundation whose name commemorates the site of the 'Plea Court', the present church dates from the fourteenth century and was extensively restored in 1887. Since being deconsecrated in the 1960s it has been used as an antiques centre and a religious bookshop. The churchyard is higher than the path leading to the church door – the result of centuries of burials. The large clock on the tower with its 'Forget Me Not' motto dates from 1827.

Leave the churchyard turning right, cross Redwell Street and walk down St Andrew's Hill back to the start of the walk.

*L-R: St Michael at Plea Church  
and an ancient house that once  
stood on Queen Street*





NORWICH  
HEART

## Norwich HEART

The Norwich Trails series has been created by Norwich Heritage Economic and Regeneration Trust (HEART), a private, charitable company set up to act as an umbrella organisation for all the fantastic and often unknown heritage on offer in Norwich.

We strategically plan, regenerate, manage and promote Norwich's heritage resources and act as a best practice case study nationally and internationally for developing heritage as a vehicle for social and economic regeneration.

We believe Norwich deserves to be known as one of the premier heritage destinations in Europe. We therefore aim to act as a champion of the city's outstanding heritage, protecting and promoting our inherited past in a range of innovative ways so that more people can enjoy it and so that heritage can continue to play a pivotal role in the future of this vibrant city.

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[www.heritagecity.org](http://www.heritagecity.org)

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**ELM HILL HISTORICAL TRAIL**

0.5 mile / 0.8 km Time: 30 mins+